R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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HANDWRITING, EXPLORATION OF HANDWRITING SKILLS WITH HEAD START CHILDREN.

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DESCRIPTORS- *WRITING, *HANDWRITING, *HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION, *TEACHING GUIDES, *LITERACY, KINDERGARTEN, GRADE 1, UNITS OF STUDY (SUBJECT FIELDS), CLASSROOM GAMES, ACHIEVEMENT, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, HANDWRITING SKILLS, PROJECT LITERACY, PROJECT HEAD START

RECOMMENDATIONS ARE GIVEN FOR STARTING CHILDREN ON LEARNING HANDWRITING SKILLS. FROM OBSERVATIONS MADE OF SOME 5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN PROJECT HEADSTART, THE AUTHOR DEVELOPED THE DESCRIBED PROCEDURES "TO GET CHILDREN WRITING LEGIBLY BUT NOT NECESSARILY BEAUTIFULLY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." SOME OF THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED WERE (1) BEST SIZE OF LETTERS FOR CHILDREN TO MAKE WHEN STARTING TO WRITE, (2) TEACHING CHILDREN NOT TO START LETTERS FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WRITING SPACE WHICH CAUSES SOME LETTERS TO BE INVERTED SUCH AS "M" FOR "W", (3) USE OF FINGER TRACING OF LETTERS TO HELP CHILDREN LEARN BETTER FORMS AND RHYTHM IN LETTER FORMATION, (4) A 6-DAY SEQUENCE FOR TEACHING LETTER FORMATION, (5) A METHOD FOR EVALUATING HANDWRITING PROGRESS, (6) TECHNIQUES FOR IDENTIFYING THE LEFT- OR RIGHT-HANDED CHILD, AND (7) SAMPLES OF LESSONS, GAMES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT COULD BE USED IN THE FIRST WEEK OF HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION. THIS MATERIAL WAS DEVELOPED AS PART OF "PROJECT LITERACY," A BASIC RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN AREAS OF EDUCATION RELEVANT TO THE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS. (JH)

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Handwriting

MSA

Exploration of handwriting skills with Head Start children

Because no research evidence bearing on the questions raised about handwriting was found, it was decided to start getting some feedback on what things are natural, easy, difficult and impossible for young children to do. Having observed some middle-class children it was thought it would be valuable to try some things out with lower SES children.

Six five-year-old children from the Project Head Start nursery school were individually asked to do a set of handwriting tasks. These consisted of

1) asking them to produce any letters they knew on unlined paper

2) asking them to copy various types of lines (upstroke and downstroke lines, circles, part circles, forms reversing line direction - W, coordinating lines and circles, coordinating lines and lines, and producing curved connecting lines) and

3) asking them to produce these various lines within various-sized spaces (1/2 inch, 1 inch and 2 inches).

Observations were also made of the ways the children held the regular-sized pencil and the difficulty of using this pencil in the writing tasks.

Most children observed were able to produce a few letters--especially ones in their names. The sizes of these letters varied but 4 of the 6 children when making o's without lined paper made them less than an inch in size. The children did very well on the straight lines--both up and down strokes, and stayed within the line fairly well. They also did not have much trouble reversing direction on lines, making W type forms without lifting their pencils. Some children did pretty well coordinating lines to form a V form with two strokes and some did not. All children had trouble coordinating lines and circles and drawing the connected curved lines. Some of the children who could not make the ℓ form, were asked to make an 'a' using the connected line method (which includes this connected curved line ℓ) and they did much better on it than on the segment. Thus this whole letter may be easier to make than a segment of it. Most children tended to start their letters from the bottom, even when encouraged to start from the top, and (perhaps because of this) there were quite a few upside down and sidewise reversals of letters (M for W, ⊃ for C, ∩ for U, etc.)

In general the children did not seem to have trouble making letters in the small spaces and with some forms the smaller ones showed more control (less wiggles, stopping of pencil, retracing).

The children also did pretty well holding the pencils; most 'mishandling' consisted of lapping the index finger over the pencil and grasping the pencil too far up.

Obviously there is need for a careful research study that would investigate these various issues.

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Type of Handwriting System and Procedures

Because 1) no research was found that bore on a choice of manuscript systems, 2) in our observations all methods of making the more complex letters seem to be difficult, and 3) the main objective of the handwriting program is to get the children writing legibly but not necessarily beautifully as soon as possible, it was decided to follow our own hunches about letter forms. Any new published handwriting programs or overlooked relevant research plus feelings about the current program could be evaluated at the next summer conference. Also, because research could not be found supporting the notion that children should first start by making very large letters and because in our observations children seemed to control small circular letters better than large ones, a decision was made to start out handwriting with 1" and ½" letters primarily but allow children to use larger spaces for writing if they prefer to do so. The smaller-sized letters also seem to have the advantage of allowing sentences to be written on one sheet of paper, which would help in integrating writing with reading and phonics.

It was also decided that children be allowed to choose either a regular-sized pencil, or a fat one, since the children we observed seemed to have no trouble holding the smaller one.

Decisions made about teaching procedures are the following:

1) to omit board practice with chalk as a regular first step

2) to omit tracing of letters with a pencil as a regular first step

Writing with chalk on a board involves not only a different hand-arm-body coordination with the surface at a different orientation, but requires that the child hold the chalk in a different manner from the way he holds a pencil. The teachers will continue to demonstrate letter formation on the board. The reasons for omitting tracing of letters with a pencil are outlined in the previous paper on handwriting.

It was decided to try finger tracing of letters as an early procedure both to help communicate form and the method for producing it, and to help establish rhythm in making the letters. (intuition-based) Children will then go immediately into producing the letters on their own with a pencil. As soon as possible, letters will be incorporated into words and words into sentences to help focus attention on spacing and provide for integration with the reading and phonics programs.

Work on letter discrimination, recognition, and identification will parallel for some letters but for the most part precede the introduction of the writing of the letters. This communication of letter forms is seen as a first step in handwriting and thus may accelerate the teaching of writing somewhat. It is possible that the teachers may want to precede handwriting lessons by such discrimination and identification games which include the letter or letters to be taught in the handwriting lesson.

Sequencing

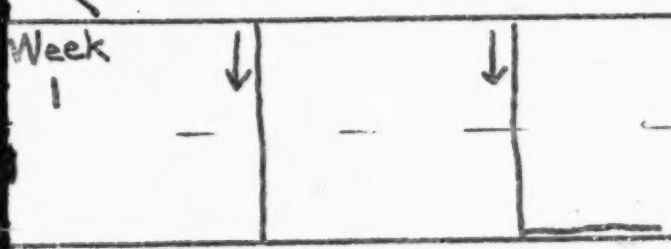
A sequence of letters was set up based on the letter forms-putting easiest letters early and grouping letters that are made similarly, together. This sequence was then modified so that the first letters introduced in phonics would be taught fairly early in handwriting.

Because of the reasons enumerated in the first handwriting mimeo, it was decided that a few capital letters that are similar to the lower case forms will be taught concurrently with some of the first lower case forms. The more irregular capitals will be taught in handwriting after the rest of the lower case forms are introduced. The children, however, will be exposed to the capital forms of all letters in prepared materials and have identification and matching practice with the forms before this time.

The sequence of teaching with arrows showing the direction of formation is attached.

Sequence

Week 1



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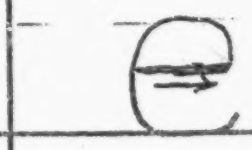

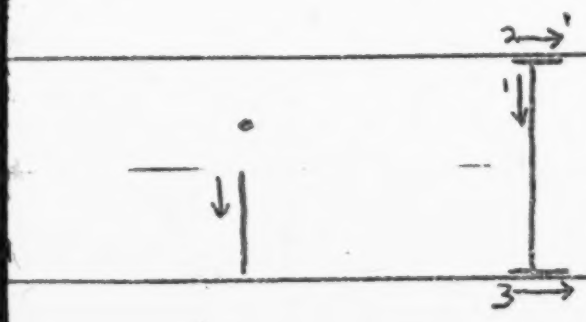

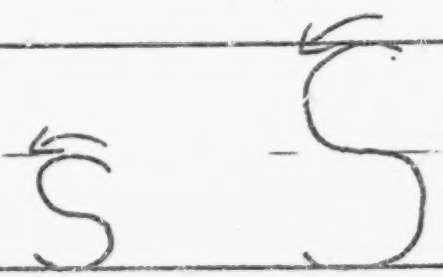

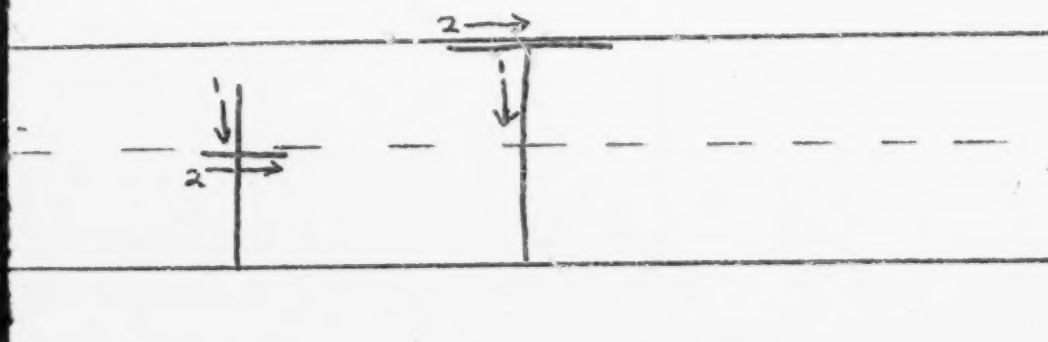

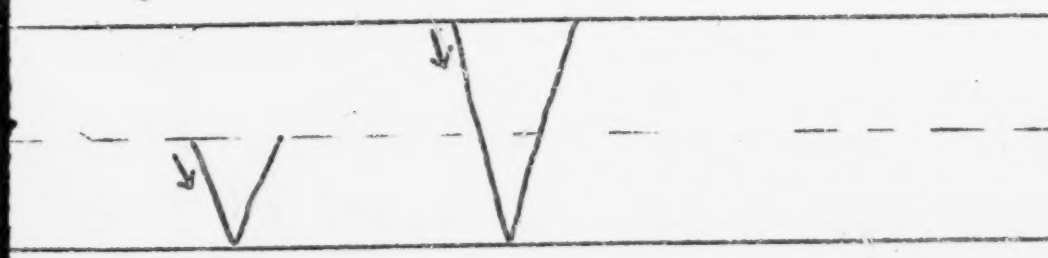

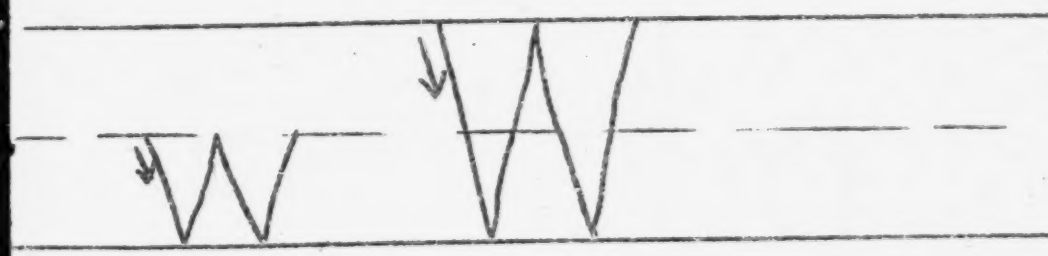

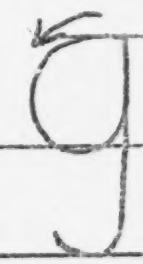

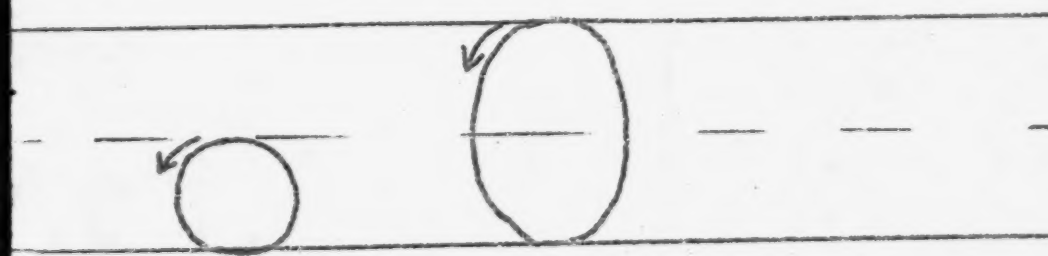

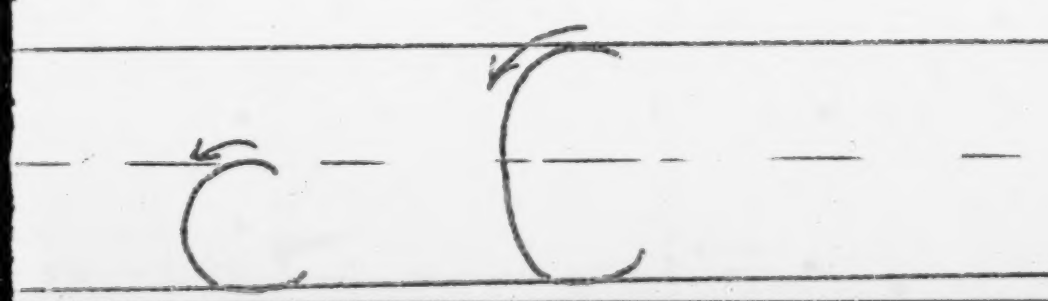

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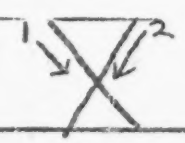

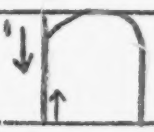

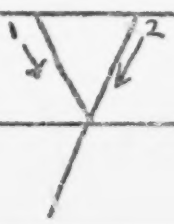

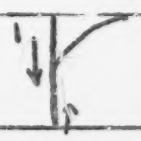

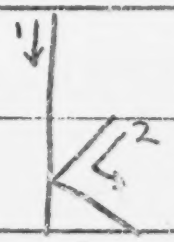

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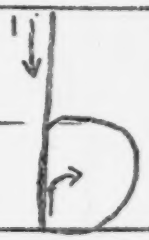

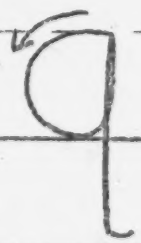

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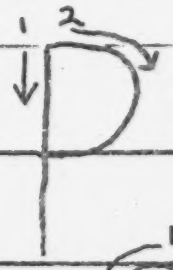

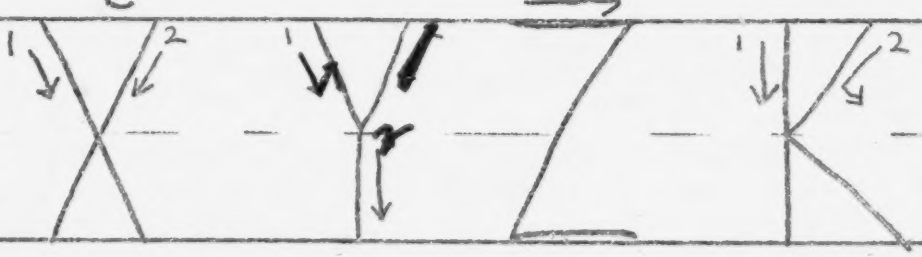

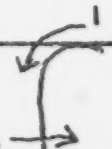

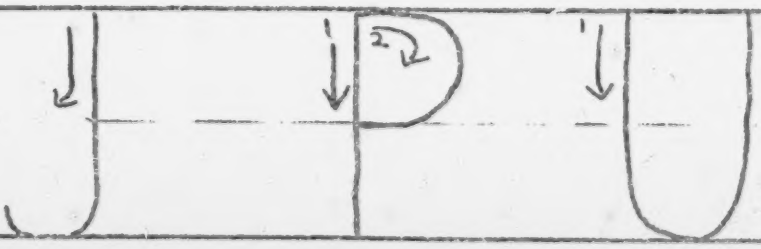

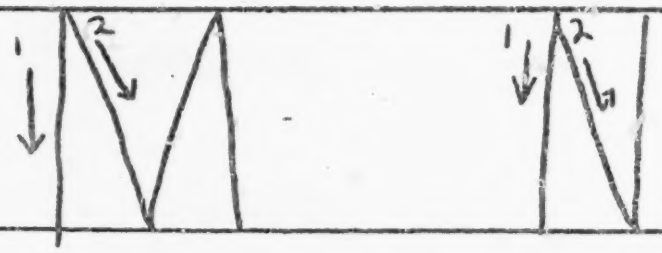

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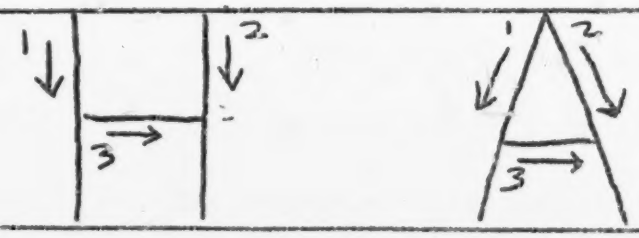

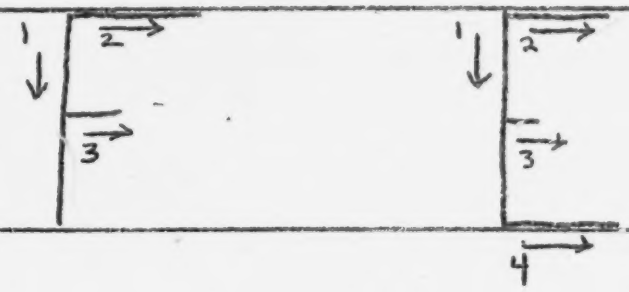

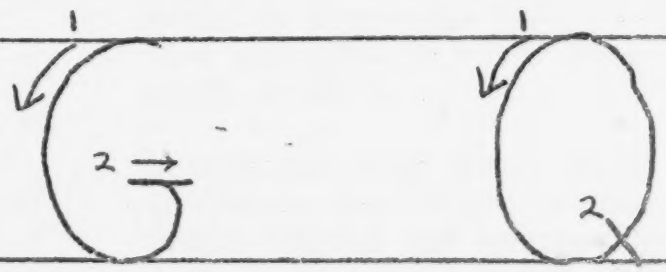

Handwriting

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Evaluation

A. On one of the first days of school children will be asked to copy the sentence below.

This year I will be reading many books.

(includes 17 letters of alphabet)

The observer will use the checklist in observing the children writing and give to the teacher to complete after samples are finished. Children already writing well or children having a lot of difficulty may be spotted in this rough check and also the teacher may want to revise the rate of letter presentation according to class performance. The teacher may want to have monthly or bimonthly samples of this sentence to gauge progress.

B. Handedness

Some children are not clear about whether they are right or left-handed. The teacher might include a few questions or activities in left-right drills during the first few days to check on this.

1. Pretend you are eating cereal like you do at breakfast - pick up your spoon.

2. Pretend you are brushing your hair - pick up the brush.

3. Stretch up on your toes and take the pencil off the shelf, etc.

Teachers may want to put left-handed children in an area of the room so it will be easy to keep an eye on them during handwriting lessons.

Special Supplies and Equipment

Although individual chalk slates were considered, it was decided that individual magic slates for each child might be a better device because the stylus used with the magic slates is more like a pencil. These slates would be desirable both to motivate the children to write during their free time and also to allow them to have a non-permanent practice medium for early handwriting lessons. The slates could also be used for various games.

Dittos for each letter will be given to the child showing the letter form and where the letter is started. Children will trace the letters with their fingers and be provided with space on the ditto to practice the letter with their model right above them. As the children learn new letters they will be given small cards with the letters on them so that they may manipulate them to make words and also use them as models for their other writing tasks. The children will also be given a card with all the letters written on it for reference at their seats.

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Organization

Class organization for handwriting lessons will depend on the diversity of abilities and the presence or absense of children with special coordination problems. Most early lessons will probably continue to be done with the whole class. It is hoped that early evaluation of abilities plus a variety of activities including sentence and story writing will enable the teacher to allow children with knowledge of letter formation to do more interesting writing activities independently. Exercises and activities for children with special coordination problems still need to be discussed.

Samples of lessons, games, and activities that might be used during the first week:

Day 1 Lesson (preceded by visual discrimination practice)
(of handwriting not necessarily school)

1. Hand out dittos, pencil holding instruction.

2. Have children trace straight lines with finger stressing where to begin (arrow on ditto) and where to end and staying within the lines. (Teacher demonstrates on board) Have children trace letter with erasers.

3. Have children practice making lines with pencils below models on ditto -- both 1/2" and 1".

4. Have children write i's and l's in word ill. (Teacher may introduce with sentence if she likes) Teacher stress need for watching spacing between letters and larger spaces between words so not run together. Practice a few times.

5. Talk about each letter also having capital letter form and briefly when to use capitals. Have volunteer pick out two forms of L and two forms of I & put on feltboard (already this discrimination and pairing has been practiced).

6. Pass out seoond ditto. Have children trace two L forms and write; trace two I forms and write. (Trace with fingers and erasers.)

Additional Lesson Steps might be used:

1. Practice of letters or words on magic slate.

3. Practice of movements for speed and rhythm by completing pictures on ditto (see example).

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3. Practice of new letters and review of old by writing sentences (I lit it. with candle picture to color after second lesson.)

Games and Activities

1. I will game, after third lesson

Teacher asks children questions such as (a) "Who will be going home for lunch?" or (b) "Who will be going to the band concert tonight?" (c) "Who will go take the note to Miss Wilson's office?" (d) "Who will change the weather chart?"

Children wishing to make a positive answer are supposed to write I will on their slates and those wishing to respond negatively leave their slates blank; at signal all hold slates up so teacher can see answers.

2. Cartoons

Teacher places a pixie cartoon on board at beginning of handwriting lesson concerning that letter and at end of lesson, children can guess what punch line is. If none have idea or no one guesses, teacher tells.

Ex.

Punch line: Darn, I always forget my umbrella on the days it rains.

Teacher encourages children to tell parents or brothers or sisters.

3. Word Match Game (handwriting and visual discrimination of words)

Teacher passes out simple short words (made up of handwriting letters) on cards to each child. (2 or 3 have same words) Each child writes his on his slate and turns slate over. At signal, children try to find partners by holding up slates against chests. (Probably need rule that cannot speak out loud. and maybe have only a few children playing against each other moving around the room and others sitting at desks holding up slates.)

4. Word Soup

Give each child three or four separate word cards (had in phonics or writing or reading). Child must discover sentence and copy on paper.

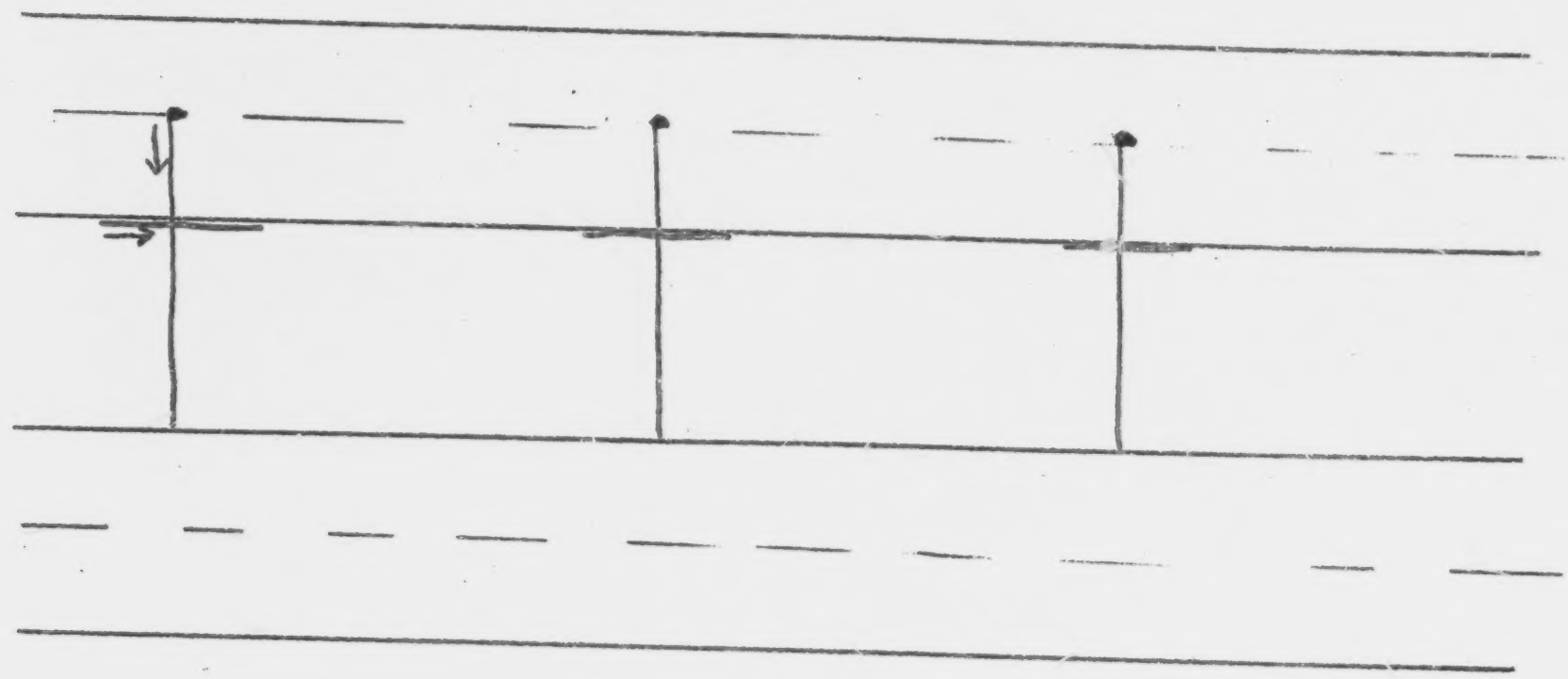
5. Fill in Alphabets (used after most letters learned)

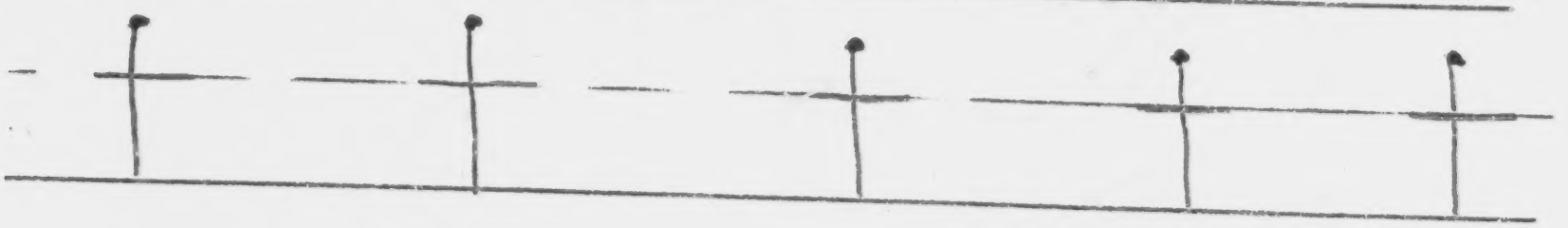
Worksheets having alphabet with some letters missing; child must fill in spaces with correct letter. (He has his own alphabet copy at his desk for reference.)

6. Journal Writing Children have journals for continuous recording of everyday events or make-believe stories. Children after learning letters and some reading and phonics skills might be asked to add to their journals every day or so during their free time.

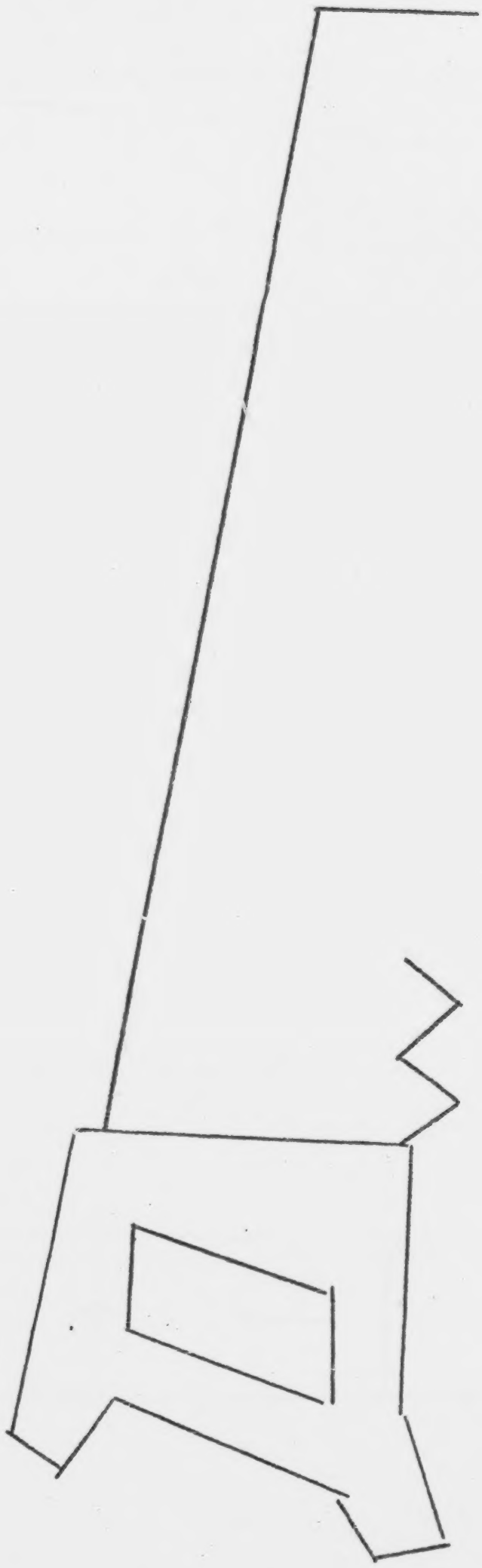
CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATION OF HANDWRITING

Child's Name	Hand Uses R. or L.	Production of Sample			Final Product		
		Child writes easily and rapidly- may be able to produce nletters already	Child copying letters - not too much trouble	Lots of trouble-slow-poor coordinat.	Poor Forms (List)	Spacing Trouble	Bears down too hard-quality of line poor





I tit it



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